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Sergio Benvenuto

## “Impossible” Training of Analysts: Sergio Benvenuto Interviews Elvio Fachinelli

Elvio Fachinelli, M.D.(1928-1989) was a “dissident” psychoanalyst in Milan where, in the 1970’s, he founded the important counter-culture journal *L’erba voglio*. For many years he also published a series of witty “psycho-political” articles in the popular Italian weekly *L’Espresso*, establishing a strong link between psychoanalysis and the emancipation movements of the time. Although he remained a member of the official IPA-affiliated Italian Psychoanalytic Society (SPI), in 1969 Fachinelli led a public protest against the psychoanalytic establishment, which he strongly criticized for its conservatism. He was also one of Italy’s foremost translators of Freud, responsible for the translation of *The Interpretation of Dreams* as well as other texts in the Standard Edition. Among his most daring and important works – all untranslated into English, save for occasional excerpts appearing in the Journal of European Psychoanalysis – are the books *La freccia ferma*(1979), *Claustrofilia*(1983) and *La mente estatica*(1989), all published by the prestigious Adelphi Edizioni (Milan).

In this conversation dating from the 1980s, Sergio Benvenuto explores with Fachinelli the state of psychoanalysis in Italy at the time, highlighting particular possibilities for crisis beyond any national borders. In a thorough critique of the training system of the Italian Psychoanalytic Society (which was/is, in fact, common to most psychoanalytic societies), Fachinelli questions the very notion of “training analysis,” reaffirming the autonomy of the analytic relationship against all professional controls and requirements for “proper” training. In this light, he also examines the shortcomings of the alternative strategy of the *passeport* forth by Jacques Lacan, a friend of his whom he squarely confronted on such matters.

This interview with Fachinelli, titled “The Impossible Training of Analysts,” while yet to appear in the Journal of European Psychoanalysis, holds a special meaning for its Editors. Excerpted from a slightly longer conversation included in the volume *La bottega dell’anima*(S. Benvenuto and O. Nicolaus, eds. Rome: FrancoAngeli, 1990), it appears here for the first time in English translation, courtesy of FrancoAngeli Editore.

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**Sergio Benvenuto:** *You are a member of both the Italian Psychoanalytical Society (SPI ), and of the International Psychoanalytic Association. In the SPI, as in other IPA societies, there is a hierarchy that ranks its affiliates, moving from candidates to associates to full members...*

**Elvio Fachinelli:** I do belong to the SPI, but only as an associate. In fact about half of the full members are also training analysts...

*You're known to be hostile to the role of training analyst...*

A few years ago, at an assembly of the SPI, I proposed we abolish the role of training analyst. I did so partly because the role of training analyst is not, or at least was not, even universally instituted in all the societies adhering to the IPA. A commission was then set up to study the matter, which I presided over for two or three years – following which it was disbanded, without having accomplished anything. Since then things have worsened, and the Society has become even more hierarchical! Yet even in this situation, I still did not want to leave the SPI, given my origins there: Musatti[1], you know, was my analyst, and perhaps a transferential residue, or one might say an affection, kept me there, together with the wish to avoid being ostracised. I remained resolved, however, not to climb the career ladder, but to persist in the “lateral” position of associate. This was a provocation, if you like, something that many imbeciles who have since passed me by in the hierarchy do not even understand. But to me it seemed consistent with an attitude I have always maintained vis-a-vis the Society.

*How does one enter the SPI? and how does one climb that career ladder?*

Every year one pays membership dues, like in any other club. If someone does not pay, after a few years he is considered to have resigned. But very few people do indeed resign. In order to pass from one level to the next one makes a series of case presentations and in this way gradually climbs the ladder, moving from candidate to associate to full member and, ultimately, to *training analyst*. In the course of this itinerary nearly everyone – and especially those closer to the top of the ladder – is subjected to a set of arbitrary criteria of co-optation. Personally, I have never taken any of the necessary steps to move beyond the level of associate. I've continued to write and publish on my own, refusing to play such a game and involve myself in procedures where bureaucracy and infantilism are so combined.

*If it is the structure that you disagree with, why propose the abolition of the role of training analyst rather than a restructuring of the whole process?*

Because a differentiation between those who've worked as analysts for a year or two and those who've done so for five, seven or more years does not seem pointless to me. That which is still called a “training analysis” out of habit should indeed be conducted by an experienced analyst – who ought not, however, need to belong to a sort of corporation of «*training analysts*». Upon completing his analysis, the person wishing to enter the psychoanalytical society should make his application and the society should be free to accept or refuse him. Then, once admitted, one enters fully, without the extent of one's rights being dependent on the need to rack up more and more points along the way. All this while the analysis itself should, ideally, not be subjected to any institutional evaluation or control.

There is often, even if rarely evidenced, a desire to become part of the constituted order. But the desire for one's training analysis to function as a gateway into the psychoanalytical society should be minimal, and should itself be subject to analytic scrutiny. Instead the existence of a privileged circle of training analysts gives the analysis a sort of preliminary *imprimatur*, a sort of guarantee that carries with it a right to enter the society – which is an obstacle to the process of analysis itself. And this is so whether the training analyst is directly involved in the admission procedure, or whether he is not (as is the case in the Italian society). The training analyst himself, precisely because of his privileged status, is too often concerned that his own students or protégés be admitted. This is something that radically falsifies the analytical process. Perhaps

instead of “training analysis” we should use the term “pseudo-analysis”, for the former is but one of the several kinds of pseudo-analysis existing today.

*Your proposal to eliminate the role of training analyst ends up putting the very concept of training analysis into question. For example, in one of Italy's Jungian associations, positions prevail that are similar to yours: for example, there is no distinction made between a training analysis and an ordinary analysis. Some Jungians even go so far as saying that so-called training analyses are a fraud...*

I maintain this paradox: every personal analysis is a training analysis in the sense that if the analysis proceeds, the patient inevitably assumes the position of analyst. If you learn a craft you will be able to do what you want with it, whether you become an analyst or not, with one exception: which is precisely that of the training analysis. This is because the training analysis is strongly conditioned by an external goal: namely, admission into the SPI country club, or other similar societies, which by definition can only falsify the process.

*An analyst of the SPI once made the claim ? citing his barber, who in turn was referring to an apprentice of his ? that «a craft has to be stolen». In other words, it is not a mere matter of teaching: a pupil must learn what to do from one who is more experienced. Still, in the SPI it is necessary to have interviews with three training analysts before being accepted into analysis and, subsequently, into training...*

In the very moment someone is interviewed by a training analyst – no matter the number of interviews – he is looking to be co-opted into the psychoanalytical society. As regards the criteria with which one is accepted or not, these are always and invariably extra-analytical, based as they are on impressions, intuitions, idiosyncrasies... or on that which the training analyst considers his personal intuition, not unlike a dog sniffing out truffles... It is evident that faced with this first passage of the psychoanalytical Aereopagus the candidate will be extremely prudent, and certain to act in a contrived way. He will do his best to find out what it is that each examiner looks for, in order to always make the best possible impression. He will be sure to put his best foot forward, or show his most seductive mask, or simply just an «average» face, that won't reveal any dangerous peculiarities... This is one of the passages in which psychoanalysis becomes a form of comedy, which could easily lend itself to a theatrical or movie script...

After such an entrance exam, if the candidate is accepted, he will be considered *destined* to enter this society that promises him security, recognition and ? *last but not least*? clients. He feels that he has been promoted to the role of analyst of the society from the very start, and from here on will be very careful not to do anything that could hinder or detour this “destiny”...

*Doesn't your own personal training also fit this pattern? On what experience do you base your claim that SPI training analyses are, paradoxically, the least formative of all?*

My analysis with Cesare Musatti would probably, according to present-day criteria, be judged a «wild» analysis, as would most analyses conducted by the first generation of psychoanalysts. And yet, in my opinion, it was a good analysis: I was often surprised, something I hold to be fundamental to every analysis. I learned a lot, and also enjoyed myself. This is certainly a merit of Musatti's, who in his best moments was an ingenious clown, a trickster who certainly did not fit the bill of the neutral or absent figure preached, but not practiced, by Freud himself. My analysis, moreover, took place at a time when the SPI had nothing of the central position it now enjoys. Back then, it was the centre of itself, not the centre of the vast psychotherapeutic nebula that has formed in recent years. The society was more similar to the first Freudian enclaves than to the bureaucratic fortress it has since become. And Musatti himself was very uncertain

regarding the future of psychoanalysis, envisioning times of scarcity for his students, if not of all-out disaster.

Belonging to the SPI was much less a guarantee than it is now. In a certain sense membership was much more significant: one belonged to a work group, a research team, inhabited by different persuasions and currents of thought where each person was free to think for himself. But some very strong, and by no means diplomatic, personal skirmishes and conflicts resulted from this state of affairs. I do not wish to idealize things: the fact that belonging to the SPI of that time was different from the present situation does not mean that the society did not also contain, in its origin – albeit not in a fateful way – the seeds of the evolution that unfortunately followed. My own analysis was also negatively affected by the problem of belonging to the group. An absolutely «pure» form of analysis does not exist. But the level of impurity reached by today's training analyses seems to me excessive, and the results, in terms of colourless mediocrity and watered-down standards, seem palpable to me.

*What makes you think that today's situation is so catastrophic?*

Catastrophic! What a drastic term for a situation in which the SPI exists and prospers as a strong society... and yet it seems to me that the state of things is deeply distorted and not sufficiently analyzed. Take a macroscopic piece of data: among the people that come into analysis, the idea of becoming a professional analyst is much more widespread today than it was fifteen years ago. Just consider the increasing number of psychology graduates (itself an effect of the increasing “psychologization” of society in general), as well as the interest in psychoanalytical training not only on the part of psychiatrists, but of non-psychiatric doctors as well... All this, alongside the enormous societal demand for *professionalism* in general, has reinforced the importance of the SPI as a centre for training and belonging.

At the same time, one's *personal* relationship with analysis tends to pass into the background if compared to the prospect of a guaranteed professional training. Consequently, the SPI tends to develop as sort of association of registered professionals, like that of doctors or lawyers: an association that confers legitimacy to those who belong to it and denies or tries to deny legitimacy to those on the outside. Consider the issue of the title *psicoanalista* (“psychoanalyst”) which, according to some exponents of the SPI, should be restricted to members of the Society, while the rubble of therapists would only get to call themselves “*psicanalisti*” (without the ‘o’). This is a ridiculous distinction, marking a grotesque aspiration towards legitimacy.

It nevertheless remains true that the demand for professional training is on the rise all over the world. Nowadays I myself have many more requests of this type than I did before. It is a disturbing situation: the genuine patients are disappearing while the numbers of future colleagues grow.

*Many people come to you, even though you are not a training analyst. This does not seem to me the best way for them to guarantee themselves a career.*

My position is one of strength and weakness at the same time. If, during a person's initial interviews with me, it becomes clear that he or she is intent on becoming an analyst, I immediately inform them that I am not a training analyst, have no intention of becoming one, and that if they want to enter the SPI they will have to go through a bureaucratic process from which I am completely extraneous. But generally the people that come to me who are thinking of becoming analysts already know this position of mine. They just want to be in analysis with me. Some of them say they have no intention of entering the SPI, while others declare that they will later on undergo a period of analysis with an official training analyst. This arrangement is a sort of double régime: *personal* analysis with me and *professional* analysis with an enabler of the Society.

*One might say such people turn to you to learn the art, rather than to build themselves a career...*

Basically what happens is the exact opposite of what happens in a so-called training analysis. People come to me for who I am or what they imagine me to be. Others go to a training analyst for what he represents within the Society. And therefore many so-called training analyses are conducted by people who are non-existent on a cultural and scientific level – at times even on a simply “human” plane – or by outright imbeciles. But they are, nonetheless, imbeciles with a licence...

Yes, people come to me to learn the art. And herein above all is evidenced the paradoxical fact that with me one embarks on a personal analysis, in which the desire to become an analyst is explored like everything else. As is the reason they’ve chosen me to be their analyst – surely not the best or most favourable way to ensure a career for oneself!

*What you do, in a way, is set up a workshop, in the tradition of medieval arts and trades...*

It is true that the workshop, as you put it, means organizing into a group. And a group tends immediately to promote practices and ideologies which – it is no coincidence – in this context look a lot like those of the SPI. Personally, I mistrust psychoanalytical groups; indeed I mistrust most any kind of organized group, the result of negative experiences of my own. Freud wanted to set up a rigidly organized group, but he would have been better off had he explored in depth this desire of his... and he’d have been better served had he scrutinized the group itself, once he’d constituted it (rather than privately criticizing it): just as he’d done with the army, or the Church. Lacan too wanted to set up a group, although on different grounds, and that outcome as well was certainly not encouraging. Basically, for me analysis is an adventure, a private journey that takes place within the bounds of a historically structured relationship, between one person who speaks as freely as possible and another who, essentially, is there to listen. Freud invented something unique, something with no historical precedent. Something that persists in the same way the Platonic dialogue persists. Psychoanalysis is a configuration within which everyone is allowed to practice, which certainly does not exhaust the range and scope of human relations and which has very little to do with those professional societies that claim to be based upon it. For them, other rules are relevant and other types of observation are necessary.

But, to come back to my own activities, I should mention that people also come to me for clinical supervision...

*Does the SPI have specific rules regarding supervision as well?*

No, it would be the height of absurdity if the title “supervisor” existed... like something out of Gogol. But one cannot deny the possibility that, considering present developments, it could be created as an intermediate title somewhere between that of senior analyst and training analyst!

*These people who come to ask for supervision... are they mostly people who have already been analyzed? Are they psychiatrists or doctors who work in the public sphere?*

They make for a rather diversified group: doctors, psychiatrists and anti-psychiatrists too, to use the faddish terminology of some years ago. They are people who at a certain moment have asked themselves: “What can I do to help this person in difficulty?” They consult me, together we discuss their patients, and they then proceed to work on the basis of what they can contribute within their specific contexts – and not on the basis of what they “should” do from a strictly psychoanalytical point of view.

*Do you purposely keep these supervisions brief?*

I tell people from the start that it's how I work. Supervisions that drag on for years involve the same risks as training analyses: the supervisor fatally tends, whether he is aware of it or not, to impress his own stamp or style on the person being supervised. Some actually do so deliberately, and it should be said that there are many students who want to be branded in this way. With training analyses and supervisions, a relationship of a pedagogical nature, often authoritarian, easily tends to become institutionalized. And the transference as well can't help but get inflected in this sense.

*It must be truly difficult for an SPI candidate or a student in training analysis to accept the fact that his analyst is also, in a way, his judge. This will provoke some distressing dilemmas, not the least of which concerns the patient's freedom to bring his or her deepest issues into the analysis: issues the analyst might consider psychotic, whether rightly or wrongly so, that will invariably conflict with the student's need to present his or her best image to the analyst-judge. That the role of analyst and the role of judge are on a collision course seems totally obvious to me...*

This is also true when the figures of analyst and judge are not combined within the same person, but are "located", so to speak, in different people. In every analysis, alongside repression and other unconscious defence mechanisms, reticence and lies get thrown into the mix. This degree of dissimulation obviously tends to be greater in institutionalized analysis.

*How is it possible that the leaders of the SPI, people with a great deal of experience, do not realise things that seem so obvious to the two of us?*

I think many perceive this state of affairs, but consider it to be an irresolvable problem. They recognize the existence of these distortions when they get pointed out— that is, of course, if they themselves have not already been deformed by their own identification with their role in the Society. But they hold the situation to be unavoidable. They are unable to think outside of an institutional perspective. They say: "but we have a course of study to salvage, analyses and supervisions that do manage to train people with a certain degree of proficiency". Still, the process of training and co-optation ultimately selects dulled and smoothed-over personalities without any sharp edges: people without any obvious abnormal traits but also without any real personality. They make for a crowd of "grey" candidates: analysts without any soul, ritualistic ghosts of analysis. This is the fundamental problem according to most lucid observers.

*Are these candidates dull to start off with, or is it the training that dulls them?*

In effect one asks oneself: were these "young people", who often have grey hair and two or three children, already this way before entering analysis, or did they become this way because of analysis? It's a question to set you trembling... There are some thirty-five or forty year old candidates who are always absolutely silent at meetings. I call them "the tongueless ones". Analysis certainly provokes situations of regression, but it should also resolve them! In these meetings (which, by the way, almost none of the training analysts attend, as if they were of no interest to them), those who present a body of work are almost always associates or senior members. Out of about fifty people present, for example, there might be thirty or thirty-five candidates and very few of them ever open their mouths.

But in Italy, even if outside the SPI, is there a vitality that counters the “greyness” and the silence of the Society?

It’s hard to say. But, in Italy at least, the fact of whether one belongs or not to a “serious” society is a mark of selectivity. This distinctive sense of belonging moves people to say: “We may have all these hoops to jump through, all these trials and tribulations to endure, but in the end at least we’ll have had the best possible training”. But this class-like system also takes its toll on those who do not directly participate in it. The former derive a sense of security from the Society, while the second derive only insecurity, that goes hand-in-hand with a tendency to idealize the very society from which they are excluded. I also have the impression that, except for our Lacanian groups, which have a rather consolidated and autonomous system of references, the other psychotherapy organizations all criticize and/or imitate the SPI.

*Why is the SPI so strong in Italy and why is its prestige on the increase? It seems stronger than the official societies in other countries with a long-standing psychoanalytical tradition, and yet only a few internationally recognized figures have ever come out of the SPI. Aside from Edoardo Weiss, founder of the SPI and the only Italian analyst to have enjoyed international fame (due also to the fact that he later went to the United States), no Italian analyst has ever had an international reputation: no Klein, Winnicott, Lacan, Bion, Balint, or Kohut has ever come out of Italy. The most famous is perhaps Ignacio Matte Blanco who, however, is not Italian-born and otherwise writes in English.*

Localism, so to speak, is a problem of Italian culture in general which, to put it succinctly, imports a lot and exports little. There are many reasons for this. In any case, it does not seem appropriate or justified to me to derive, as you seem to do, a value judgment from this. Otherwise one risks falling into the typical Italian attitude of self-denigration, which personally I far prefer to the attitude of nationalistic arrogance of the French, just to give an example, but which in the end can turn out to be harmful. We might however consider a peculiar feature of Italian psychoanalysis, which is its tendency to adopt masters from other shores. This is the case for Bion, who today is the undisputed master psychoanalysis in Italy.

*How do you explain the great popularity of Bion in Italy, which even exceeds that which he enjoys in Great Britain? There Bion is certainly considered an important analyst, but not the undisputed beacon that he is here. Some years ago the Tavistock Clinic opened a school in Rome, which is now almost more important than the original centre in London... And the SPI would never have expelled someone like Meltzer, as they did in England...*

The status of “undisputed beacon”, as you put it, is in fact the product of an idealizing provincial insecurity, which runs the risk of not understanding the very model it adopts, and in the end diminishes and detracts from its true grandeur. As regards the expulsion of Meltzer, it’s something I too found hard to believe...

As for Kleinism, it entered Italy thanks to Franco Fornari, who introduced some themes and topics and elaborated others in original ways. One wonders if Klein’s popularity in Italy might not also be connected to a generic consonance between Catholicism and the themes of guilt and depression typical of Klein. Whatever the case, in the ’50s Klein was an authentic breath of fresh air within the SPI, above all as regards the way analysis was conducted. Personally, I found the seminars of Marcelle Spira and Salomon Resnik to be very meaningful. In those years Melanie Klein had for the SPI the function of an outsider whose thought was nonetheless permitted, since all attempts to marginalize her had failed. For some years it even became fashionable to go to London to attend Kleinian courses and seminars, and even to undergo a personal analysis with an analyst of the Kleinian school. Whereas I don’t think many people moved from Italy to follow Anna Freud...

*Instead it was the Americans who went to find Anna Freud...But I want to come back to the people who approach you for analysis. Some elderly analysts consider the request for analytic training as a neurotic symptom to be analyzed. In fact, in order to deal with this complication Lacan proposed the formula of the "passe". For you is it a negative thing that an analyst may still be tackling problems that brought him to analysis in the first place?*

Evidently no one has ever ended his or her analysis. To claim as much would be to admit to a sort of total transparency of an unconscious which can be tamed: a destiny for the unconscious which is certainly not to be desired! On the other hand, it must be said that a person in analysis goes only so far as his analyst can go: the impossibilities of the latter constitute the limit of the analysis that he conducts. I said: "so far as his analyst can go", not where he actually has gone personally. I therefore admit that the analyst can transcend himself, and his own personal limitations (as indeed every human can). Otherwise I would have to accept what one often hears in analytical circles, that homosexuals or lesbians, for instance, cannot be analysts. At the same time, this problem of the limits of the analyst is a serious thing. At the moment of the passage to the position of analyst – the *passe* of Lacan – there is a personal dynamic upon which the institutional passage is superimposed, as also happens in the SPI. They are two different situations, but in practice they are assimilated – or otherwise garbled and confused with each other...

*It is as if the institution arranged the "passe" in the candidate's place, perpetuating his dependency and to some degree his lack of responsibility...*

One could say so, even though the moment of *recognition* theoretically cannot be only one of self-recognition, since it always necessarily implies an Other. It is instead the modalities of this recognition that are in question. In any case, the person who does *not* wish to be an analyst has always been more interesting for me, in the first sessions at least. When a psychologist comes to me and says that he wants to be an analyst, I feel a sense of heaviness... to me he seems to be someone wanting always to remain on the same treadmill, and wanting to drag me along with him...

*Nevertheless, as you've said, the percentage of people asking to undergo analysis for reasons of professional training is on the increase...*

It is a widespread fact, and the numbers have increased greatly in recent years. The analyst slowly but surely becomes a machine that reproduces itself. And the people who have no intention of becoming analysts do find a way to exit this circuit, which they perceive as too long and arduous and in the end not appropriate to them. It is a process that leads to a paradoxical situation: less and less patients in the classical sense and more and more future colleagues. It is what Karl Kraus observed when he said that psychoanalysis is the symptom of the disease it proposes to cure.

*But this tendency is only one side of the coin. An inverse trend also exists, one I'd call a form of "psychoanalytical colonialism", which involves bringing the gospel of psychoanalysis out of its usual "territory" and into the public services and National Health System: marking, in this way, a passage from the patient to the consumer. I'm thinking, for example, of the genuine boom in child psychoanalysis, the therapeutic offshoot of which, in any event, is the complete opposite of the self-reproduction that characterizes institutes.*

What you call psychoanalytical colonialism is also its pioneerism, or its ability to supply *alisting* – which comes before all else, and can rightly be attempted in new and different directions. I am not speaking about our theoretical baggage, which is already spread out into too many suitcases. I am speaking about an



openness and willingness to receive the other, that begins historically with Freud and that represents the effective measure of the ability of an analyst, of a psychiatrist, or of anyone who operates with some degree of curiosity on this “terrain”. This is the ambiguity of psychoanalysis, its being a sort of new passage, born in this century, that cannot be ignored even by those who operate in a completely different way. When you speak about self-reproduction and colonialism, which are certainly real phenomena, you seem to conclude that *this* is psychoanalysis. If this were so, everything would already be over and done with. But it seems to me that things are more complicated. I feel it is important that when dealing with a troubled child, rather than resorting to tranquilizers and sedatives to silence him, or to pedagogical manoeuvres, there should be someone saying: “wait a minute, let’s allow him to *speak*, whatever his way of speaking – or not speaking – may be”. This moment of suspension and of emptiness is the wellspring of psychoanalysis as a possibility for self-awareness, and is certainly a very different model from the one in which the desire to become an analyst and enter the SPI is at issue.

*Speaking about difficult children and enigmatic patients: it is well known that these most trying cases are more and more often left to the young and inexperienced analysts, while the older analysts at the top of the career ladder prefer the far easier training analyses...*

That is very true. I believe that if there is no surprise in analysis, in *each of its participants*, there is no analysis at all. There is only the rediscovery of something that has already been found, and not of anything new. To solely apply technical principles does not work even in the most rigorous of settings, and it is no coincidence that in institutional analyses there is an insistence – which verges on an obsession – on the rigour of the setting and its purity, while very little emphasis is placed on the type of inner attitude every analyst ought always maintain: on the need, above all, to let oneself be taken by surprise. This is the inevitable consequence of the normative position occupied by the training analysis, conceived to be *in compliance* with certain given rules and as a *model* analysis to be replicated. And what you say about the more difficult cases corresponds exactly to the abandonment of the frontier zones by most training analysts, harassed as they are by the demands of those who want to receive the “right” brand of training. And so they have little to say about such cases, or about the new and sometimes distressing situations that the younger analysts report to them. In these cases training analysts and supervisors issue sentences or judgments that sound like advice from old aunts.

*An analyst I know, who had a Kleinian and Lacanian dual training, once pointed out that Kleinian analysts always theorize in terms of the pre-verbal, of crude and elementary feelings, but then turn out to be veritable chatterboxes in their sessions, often speaking more than their patients. This, while many Lacanians, who insist a great deal on the power of the word and exhibit a genuine logorrhoea in their conferences and seminars, often confront their analysands with thick walls of silence...*

Yours is an interesting observation, and points to how systems and practitioners compensate for their respective forms of training. But here another factor also intervenes: the strength of the group, and not only of the psychoanalytical group, even though the psychoanalytical group above all others would seem to be in a position to criticize and modify the ferocious dynamics of exclusion that characterize every group. *Nulla salus extra ecclesiam...* In any case, nobody is scandalized by a citation *extra ecclesiam*, or if someone bases his work on the ideas of a reprobate. In Italy there is more tolerance, or indulgence, compared to what occurs in other societies...

In 1953 Lacan was hosted by the Italian society in Rome, when he delivered his celebrated “*Discours de Rome*”, precisely at the time when the war between him and the French society was raging. It is difficult to imagine an exclusion such as that practiced against Lacan taking place in Italy, even though Lacan was certainly able to seriously rattle the nerves of any society. In Italy cases of exclusion are very rare. When I

organized a conference with Bertrand Rothschild in Rome in 1969 – which actually took position against the international congress being held only a few blocks away – there were lively internal debates, but colleagues never got to the point of voting for my dismissal.

*What reactions do you provoke among your colleagues in the SPI, given your knack for public claims that often also end up in the press?*

It depends. Some probably see me as blowing smoke, making much ado about nothing. Others, instead, are aware of the problems and situations of which I've spoken, and they respect me and are even friendly towards me. I do not feel there is any widespread hostility towards me in the SPI. Certainly there are "institutional" differences of opinion. I do provoke the institution, and it is therefore legitimate that it should react to me. But I am not interested in the "long journey" through the institutions in order to change them, which Rudi Dutschke spoke about in 1968; and the idea of founding a new, radically different institution has never convinced me, however stimulating or exciting it may be. Sooner or later every group generates difficult and engulfing problems. Basically I only believe in what can be achieved, over the long haul, through a person's intelligence, and with one's own limited but personal efforts – the fruits of which may then be gathered by people unexpected or even unknown! Groups, as such, are always later developments. What's important strategically is to avoid the ostracism and sectarianism of others, and to keep in check one's own tendencies towards sectarianism, closure and self-exclusion. You could say it's a matter of deploying the astuteness of Galileo, as portrayed by Brecht, when confronted by the self-assuredness of today's psychoanalytical churches...

*But isn't the weakness of Lacanism in Italy due to the very fact that it has remained so diffuse? Wasn't the weakness of Lacan's École freudienne ultimately proven by the very fact that Lacan himself closed it down?*

I do not think the *École freudienne* was a feeble institution. There is some evidence which contradicts what you say: take for example the expulsion of Luce Irigaray and the repeated internal "purges". But in any case it was a genuine institution, with characteristics different from orthodox ones: an institution that carried its own weight and institutional destiny.

Lacan, like Freud, wanted to found an institution of his own. I met Lacan personally in 1965, before the *Écrits* were published and before he became Lacan, so to speak, the universally famous Master. For some years I kept track of what he wrote, in the magazine *La psychanalyse* and elsewhere. They were essays that one had to seek out, and for me he was a truly a secret master, as he was for just a handful of others in Italy, among whom I knew Michel David, Andrea Zanzotto and Michele Ranchetti. (I still remember Fornari's disdain, when I mentioned my discovery of Lacan to him). Well, when I personally met Lacan in Paris he immediately insisted on the necessity of setting up an *école* of his own, and of attracting disciples. I took the liberty of openly telling him that I did not see this as a necessity, and to consider my own case. I remember saying to him: "I have come to you because of certain texts of yours, and I consider you to be a master for me, perhaps even my only one. But when you speak about an *école*, I immediately feel that I am faced with a prospect that I cannot relish or agree with. In doing this you would only repeat Freud's mistake." But Lacan was evidently deaf to such talk.

But today, when I think of how he closed the *école* at the end, I find this gesture of his both admirable and at the same time totally futile. And I wonder if it might not have derived from the very knowledge of his mistake: the mistake of believing that his discourse, the Lacanian *text*, needed an institutional support. A support that in the end, right in the middle of a tidal wave of Lacanians, in the midst of his success, ended up isolating him and limiting his possibilities of communication. To use a definition of his, the full word became, through the Lacanian psalmody of the institution, empty.

The weakness of Lacanism in Italy can therefore also be connected, as you suggest, to the fact of not being an institution like the SPI and of being more fluid, or diffuse. But from another point of view, this weakness could have become a strength. Its articulation could have served as a radiating core, if only Lacanism had been introduced, say, as a focal and vital research centre. Instead you had the attempt to establish an institution, through Lacan's own direct initiative no less; but what resulted immediately loomed as a failure when compared to the SPI.

*What do you think of his idea of the passe?*

It was one of his best known and most controversial innovations and, at the same time, it remained quite a mysterious thing for anyone not directly involved in a Lacanian group. The strong point of this innovation consisted in its putting the moment of transition to the position of analyst – a key moment of any analysis – at the centre of everything. Lacan tried to connect this personal and autonomous moment, this moment of authentic movement, to the requirements of the institution – an institution seen, in turn, as the very guarantor of the passage's authenticity. In order to reach this objective, he invented the figure of a *le passeur*, or “witness” (a term we might also translate as *ferryman*): a witness of the *écolo* whom the *passant*, or “(s)he who passes through” (who looks to be accepted into the *écolo*), must speak about his own analysis. The *porteur* thus finds himself in the same position as the *passant*, which is a position of *passé*; and as a result he must report to the *jury d'agrément*, or kind of admissions committee, about what he has heard, after which the jury decides whether or not to accept the *passant*.

I believe that this was Lacan's original scheme, one which immediately caused a fracture in the group and led, according to Lacan himself, to an *impasse*. Lacan basically proposed putting a distance between the institution and the candidate by means of the creation of an intermediate figure – one could call it a brother figure – who would take on the burden of testifying by proxy regarding the validity of the *passant*'s request and on whom much of the responsibility for the final decision would therefore depend, even though he would not be a member of the judging committee itself (the *jury*). The solution Lacan thought up had the admirable goal of avoiding the paternalistic and bureaucratic co-optation of the Freudian societies, but it in no way resolved the problem of the weight of the admitting society, that becomes still more intrusive and ubiquitous via the ambiguous figure of the *porteur*. The latter, in fact, incorporates all the ambiguities of figures otherwise juxtaposed: figures, to use judicial terms, like the witness to the truth, the defence witness, and the “crown's witness” ... All this, without even citing the breach of confidentiality that takes place by speaking of one's own analysis to a stranger, or the consequences this breach has for the relationships between the various fraternal figures involved in the *passé*. It was a confused and confusing procedure, which risked creating a certain type of perverse society, in which circulating *gossip* takes on an enormous importance... a bit like the situation centuries ago in the Republic of Venice, when anonymous accusations ruled the day.

In effect Lacan realised that there was a stalemate here, and he declared as much openly. Perhaps the decision to close the *écolo* also derived from this knowledge. In any case I still have not heard a complete and circumstantiated report of what actually did lead up to the event. Moustapha Safouan attributed stalemate to the factual deficiency of the *écolo*, which was founded on the charisma of its leader and had, in short, become a mass movement. I do not believe this explanation in the least, intended as it was to salvage Lacan's proposal at all costs, even if at the expense of Lacan himself. I think that the stalemate was implicit in the original proposal, as the dissidents immediately pointed out.

*And yet, where Italy was concerned, Lacan had originally thought of you as a privileged interlocutor, although you'd not had any analytical relationship with him. Even at the time you were known publicly for your anti-institutional stance, and you were very vocal and relentless in asking “why should an institution*

*even be formed?” Still Lacan came to you, asking you to become the fulcrum of a new institution! I can’t help but wonder then if, in his request to you, one might not discern an ambivalence of Lacan’s: on the one hand his desire to found an institution, and on the other a desire to destroy it...*

The contradiction inherent in his request became apparent at the end, at the moment of the closure of his school. Perhaps it was also an enormous revelation for Lacan himself... But during his visits to Italy he certainly did not let on about any of this. He wanted very strongly to establish his school in Italy; and he definitely wanted me to be a part of it. In order to achieve this aim, he completely sidestepped my objections, which from his institutional vantage point were marginal at best; or if he did understand them, they could only pertain to other institutions, and certainly not his own... There was, clearly, a despotic aspect to Lacan, that members of the *école* experienced firsthand, and for which many still carry the scars. His contradiction consisted in the fact that, despite having spoken in an extraordinarily lucid way about the analyst as a “subject-supposed-to-know”, in the moment he directed his school and dispensed with his teachings he loomed as Knowledge itself, indeed as the only and absolute knowledge. And he himself would proudly assert as much.

*Nevertheless you seem to be still very interested in the history of Lacanism, without having been an actual follower of Lacan.*

Well, it was enough to read ten lines of Lacan to realise that he soared high above the majority of contemporary analysts – or to sense that his flight was taking him elsewhere! His idea of founding psychoanalysis as a science of meaning was certainly partial because, by his own admission, it cut out a significant part of what happens in analysis. But it was a new, original, and compelling idea. Lacan is an altogether complicated and baroque text... indeed, curiously enough and at a distance, he makes for a sort of fantastic poem, like Berlioz where music is concerned... a poem that takes inspiration from every aspect of culture... the effect is strange one, for a man who tried his whole life to found a rigorous science. In any case, it is this text or poem that has kept me interested in Lacan, much more so than his societies and schools. His invention of the *passé* seemed to me, looking in from the outside, to be a provocation aimed at the Freudian societies and, if you like, at Freud himself. But at the same time it revealed, on an enormous (and therefore funny) scale, a Sade-like aspect of his personality: “*Psychanalistes, encore un effort pour être vraiment...*” “[2]What? Just one more trick Lacan ended up playing on us...

*Translated from the Italian by Tristram Bruce and Anthony Molino*

## **Notes:**

[1] Cesare Musatti (1897-1989) was one of the founders of the SPI in 1936, together with Edoardo Weiss, Marco Levi-Bianchini, Emilio Servadio and Nicola Perrotti. At the time of the interview he was the most celebrated Italian psychoanalyst in Italy, also due to his frequent and successful TV appearances.

[2] A paraphrase of de Sade’s invocation, “*Français, encore un effort pour être vraiment républicains*”: “*Psychoanalysts, yet one more effort to truly be Republicans*”.

## **Bios:**

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**Elvio Fachinelli** (Luserna, Trento, 1928 – Milan 1989) was an M.D. and psychoanalyst in Milan where, in the 1970's, he established the journal 'L'erba voglio'. He published his witty 'psycho-political' articles there and in the popular weekly 'L'Espresso', establishing a strong connection between psychoanalysis and the emancipatory and radical movements at that time. Although he remained a member of the official Italian Psychoanalytic Society (SPI), member of IPA, in 1969 he led a public protest against the Italian psychoanalytic establishment, which he criticized for its conservative sclerosis. He authored the books: *L'erba voglio*, with Luisa Muraro and Giuseppe Sartori (Turin: Einaudi, 1971); *Il bambino dalle uova d'oro* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1974); *La freccia ferma* (Milan: L'Erba Voglio, 1979); *Claustrofobia* (Milan: Adelphi, 1983); *La mente estatica* (Milan: Adelphi, 1989); *Freud* (Milan: Adelphi 2012). 'On Time on Psychoanalysis', EJP, 12–13, 'The Psychoanalyst's Money', EJP, 18, 'On the Beach', EJP, 24.

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